DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 478 818 SP 041 663

AUTHOR	Coffin, Charles
TITLE	Touching the Future: Final Report.
INSTITUTION	American Council on Education, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	2002-00-00
NOTE	15p.; Based on substantial contributions by Patricia A. Maloney and Wilmer Cody. Prepared by the American Council on Education (ACE) Presidents' Task Force on Teacher Education.
AVAILABLE FROM	ACE Fulfillment Service, Department 191, Washington, DC 20055-0191 (Item no. 309402). Tel: 301-632-6757 Fax: 301-843-0159; Web site: http://www.acenet.edu/bookstore. For full text: http://www.acenet.edu/bookstore/pdf/2002_touch_the_future.pdf.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Administrator Role; College Presidents; *Educational Change ; Educational Quality; Elementary Secondary Education; Higher Education; *Preservice Teacher Education; *Teacher Competencies; *Teaching Skills
IDENTIFIERS	Reform Efforts

ABSTRACT

In 1999, the American Council on Education (ACE) published "To Touch the Future: Transforming the Way Teachers Are Taught," which laid a framework for college leaders engaged in reforming how their institutions educated future teachers. It examined the inadequate quality of K-12 schooling, fundamental responsibility of colleges to prepare schoolteachers, and need for decisive action by college presidents to achieve excellence in education. Research findings included: students' success depended primarily on teacher effectiveness; strong, effective teachers shared many common characteristics; and teachers were inadequately prepared to understand and apply technology. The report offered a 10-step action agenda for college presidents (e.g., take the lead in moving teacher education to the center of the institution's agenda, and strengthen inter-institutional transfer and recruitment). Since the report, the ACE has focused on raising awareness of and overcoming shortcomings in teacher education. After 2 years, the ACE concluded that action and change were most likely to occur when driven by committed, high level campus and system leaders who emphasized reform, and even under the guidance of effective leadership, but especially in its absence, the prospect of change faced pervasive inertia. The report and followup campaign resulted in many positive outcomes (e.g., the issue of teacher preparation was raised to a salient level among key stakeholders, and some states organized meetings to address relevant issues). (SM)

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Touching the Future:

Final Report

Presidents' Task Force on Teacher Education

American Council on Education

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A Call to Action

In October 1999, the American Council on Education Presidents' Task Force on Teacher Education, supported by grants from the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Ford Foundation, published its research findings and recommendations for action in a forceful, comprehensive document titled *To Touch the Future: Transforming the Way Teachers Are Taught.* The report, which commanded widespread attention in the media and among educators, laid a framework for college and university leaders to engage actively and aggressively in reforming the way their institutions educate future teachers.

Students' success in elementary and secondary school primarily depends on the effectiveness of their teachers.

The study based its arguments and recommendations on three premises: 1) the quality of the nation's elementary and secondary schooling is inadequate to the needs of the 21st century; 2) the preparation of schoolteachers is a fundamental responsibility of America's colleges and universities; and 3) decisive action by college and university presidents is essential to achieve excellence in both teacher education and the nation's schools. The panel's research found that:

- Students' success in elementary and secondary school primarily depends on the effectiveness of their teachers.
- Effective teachers demonstrate command of the subject matter they teach, strong preparation in effective pedagogical practice, and high academic performance.
- Strong and effective teacher education programs share many identifiable, common characteristics.
- The academic achievement of college graduates who teach in secondary schools is comparable to that of college graduates overall, but below average for those who teach in elementary schools.
- Teachers are inadequately prepared to understand and apply technology to teaching.
- Current mechanisms of academic quality control–at colleges and universities, in schools and school systems, and through state laws and regulations–are inadequate to ensure that only fully qualified teachers enter the profession.
- The professional environment in which teachers work does not attract or retain enough high-quality individuals to meet demand for new teachers, which is projected to be at least 2.5 million in the next decade.
- Demand for new teachers can be reduced significantly by lowering teacher attrition.
- Special efforts and incentives will be needed to correct teacher shortages in high-poverty schools, in special-needs programs, in the sciences, and among minority teachers.

Based on these findings and premises, *To Touch the Future* set forth an "action agenda" for college and university presidents, calling on them to take 10 steps:

1. *Take the lead in moving the education of teachers to the center of their institutions' agendas.*

2. *Clarify and strengthen the strategic connection between teacher education and the mission of their institutions.*

3. *Mandate campus-wide reviews of the quality of their institutions' teacher education programs.*

4. *Commission—in conjunction with their governing boards—rigorous, periodic, independent appraisals of the quality of their institutions' teacher education programs.*

5. *Require that education faculty and courses are coordinated with arts and sciences faculty and courses.*

6. *Ensure that their teacher education programs have the equipment, facilities, and personnel necessary to educate future teachers in the uses of technology.*

7. *Be advocates for graduate education, scholarship, and research in the education of teachers.*

8. *Strengthen inter-institutional transfer and recruitment.*

9. *Ensure that graduates of their teacher education programs are supported, monitored, and mentored once they enter the teaching profession.*

10. *Speak out on issues associated with teachers and teaching and join with other opinion leaders to shape public policy.*

Dissemination and Implementation

In the years following the release of *To Touch the Future*, the American Council on Education has engaged in a focused campaign to raise awareness about the shortcomings in the education of schoolteachers, as well as to help devise ways of overcoming these deficiencies. Funded by further grants from the Carnegie Corporation and the Ford Foundation, the campaign targeted college and university presidents, government officials charged with leading and regulating elementary and secondary education in the states, and the general public.

At its release, the report was featured in four of the nation's most prominent newspapers–*The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Los Angeles Times,* and *USA Today.* These stories, along with scores of other media accounts of the report, created the opportunity for us to engage more credibly with leaders in individual states and on particular campuses to encourage and assist them in taking action. ACE concurrently sent the report to the more than 3,500 college and university presidents and system heads throughout the country, to all members of Congress, as well as to key state legislators and federal education officials.

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Maintaining the initial momentum of the report required an efficient, continuous flow of information to and among those disposed and positioned to move aggressively toward the reforms that the report suggested. We determined that a dedicated web site, the Presidents' Network for the Education of Teachers (PRESNET), would best serve not only to widen circulation and awareness of the report, but also as a forum for education leaders to share ideas and information about teacher education and keep them apprised of others' progress in addressing the challenges that the report delineated. In the often halting, frustrating, and lonely pursuit of change, the knowledge that others elsewhere are cultivating similar vineyards often serves as critical motivational reinforcement. Since its inception in August 2000, nearly 200 presidents and chancellors, and several hundred senior academic administrators, have signed up to receive e-mail updates with links to new information on the PRESNET web site, while many more have accessed the site directly.

At the same time, we concluded that more targeted, personal outreach would be necessary to assist those leaders who had already begun to take the initiative in their states, their communities, or their institutions and to encourage other leaders who wished to move toward reform. Over a period of several months following the report's publication,

ACE Senior Vice President for Programs and Analysis Michael Baer made presentations to and held discussions with numerous groups of system and campus presidents and chancellors in Massachusetts, California, New York, and Kentucky, as well as addressing meetings of the Education Commission of the States, the Academic Standards Committee of the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York, and the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. These encounters brought about not only a wider appreciation of the content and urgency of *To Touch the Future,* but also, in at least two instances, formal public statements on the subject of improving teacher education.

With this initial groundwork underway, ACE retained former Kentucky Chief School Superintendent and Task Force member Wilmer Cody as senior consultant, and charged him with contacting presidents and state system heads who had demonstrated a commitment to improving teacher preparation, who had successfully undertaken K–16 initiatives, or who showed interest in advancing the work of the Task Force. Beginning in April 2000, Cody undertook a series of contacts that led to the selection of systems or institutions in several states as "willing targets" of observation, consultation, and technical assistance.

- In Kentucky, presidents and provosts held an October 2000 conference on teacher preparation for arts and sciences and education deans. ACE staff attended the meeting and provided an overview of teacher preparation efforts since the publication of *To Touch the Future.*
- In Louisiana, the state's blue ribbon commission on teacher preparation convened in January 2001 to discuss upcoming K–16 efforts. ACE's senior consultant helped develop the meeting program and also presented information for presidents.
- In Maryland, public university system head Donald Langenberg (also a member of the ACE Task Force) incorporated the 10 action steps in *To Touch the Future* into the annual evaluation for each of the system's presidents. ACE staff and the senior consultant provided a professional development session for the presidents in October 2000.
- In Mississippi, Clinton Bristow, president of Alcorn State College and a member of the ACE Task Force, invited the senior consultant to make a presentation at the fall 2000 meeting of the Mississippi Association of Colleges, a group consisting of the presidents of the state's colleges and universities. At the conference, the presidents established a task force and timeline for improving teacher preparation in the state.

- In Nebraska, the senior consultant met twice with Dennis Smith, chancellor of the University of Nebraska system, and his senior staff, to develop a consultation on teacher preparation issues.
- In North Carolina, the public university system, headed by Molly Broad, is engaged in extensive teacher preparation and professional development activities and also is home to the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, part of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. In December 2000, the senior consultant met with UNC campus deans of liberal arts and education to discuss improving teacher preparation across academic divisions.
- In Texas, the senior consultant held several meetings with Howard Graves, chancellor of the Texas A&M system, and presented a program at a summer 2001 meeting of Texas A&M leaders and the state board of education.
- In Wisconsin, Katherine Lyall, chancellor of the public university system, invited the ACE senior consultant and several other presidents and chancellors seeking to improve teacher preparation to participate in a year-long series of meetings with the Wisconsin governing board and senior staff while the system was developing its K–16 initiative. The senior consultant also met several times with Nancy Zimpher, chancellor of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and made a presentation at an October 2001 meeting of the Great Cities' Universities Presidents' Initiative.

What Was Learned

More than two years of actively observing the impact of *To Touch the Future* prompt two conclusions–one particularly heartening and the other, predictably, less so. The first is that action and change are most likely to occur when they are driven by committed, high-level campus and system leaders who dedicate their influence, tenacity, skills, and time to generating reform. The second is that, even under the guidance of effective leadership–but especially in its absence–the prospect of change faces the pervasive inertia common to organizations comprising a variety of constituent interests and points of view. With so many other education policy priorities demanding their attention and petitioning them for money, government and education officials tend to move slowly, if at all, in building the consensus necessary to refashion legislative and regulatory provisions and put new practices into action. So too with colleges and universities.

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Still, because of the vigor of individual leadership and despite the general predisposition to maintain the status quo, the Task Force report and the ACE follow-up campaign have generated a number of positive outcomes.

- They have raised the issue of teacher preparation to a salient level among college and university leaders, state education officials, and, to some degree, opinion leaders and the general public, leading them to put teacher education high on their agendas.
- They have prompted new initiatives between schools and universities at the senior executive level and have led some states to organize statewide meetings to address the issues advanced in the report.
- They have supplied campus and system leaders who were intent on reform even before the report's release with ammunition for their struggle to create change.
- They have engendered a wealth of imaginative ideas for implementing the recommendations of the Task Force, as well as providing a vehicle for sharing those ideas among education officials and campus leaders.
- They have encouraged arts and sciences faculty on many campuses to become an integral part of teacher education.
- They have demonstrated to college and university presidents that they play a significant role in and have major responsibility for the education and preparation of the nation's teachers.

Observations of and discussions during the past two years with individual system heads in seven states who were engaged in teacher education initiatives led to the following generalizations about conditions and characteristics common to successful reform efforts:

- Acute awareness on the part of the system head that universities' role in K–12 teacher quality was growing as a "hot topic" among higher education leaders, national and state lawmakers, and the general public.
- A system head known to colleagues, government officials, and campus leaders as an outspoken advocate for improving teacher education programs.
- Collaboration between the system head and the state superintendent of education to establish a council, task force, or commission to develop recommendations for improving teacher preparation.
- An appreciation of and capacity for coalition building—among politicians, higher education leaders, school officials, college and university presidents, and university faculty and administrators.
- Assignment of a senior staff member to the initiative on a full-time basis, either within the university system office or jointly with the state superintendent of education (and others).
- Incentives—such as trustee mandates, supplemental funding, political pressure, teacher education program evaluations, and presidential performance evaluations based on the program assessments—to motivate campus presidents to take the initiative seriously.
- Institutionalization of the initiative with multi-year work plans, budgets, and staff.
- Recognition that a unique set of political, budgetary, and structural circumstances shapes the agenda and the strategy of a system.

Where to Go from Here: A Work in Progress

In the face of lower state revenues and increased demand for federal dollars as a consequence of September 11 and a nationwide recession, galvanizing political attention and directing government spending toward even so popular a cause as improving the quality of elementary and postsecondary education–particularly the teacher education on which so much of that quality depends–is a daunting challenge. Even in prosperous and stable times, change comes haltingly in a field fraught with long-established practices, multiple constituencies, and calls for all manner of reform. Nonetheless, impressive progress has been made during the years since the release of *To Touch the Future* in raising the level of awareness and encouraging some states, systems, and individual institutions to take the first steps toward better teacher preparation.

To Touch the Future has provided a national platform for improving teacher education, but the real work always has been and will continue to be primarily at the state, system, and campus levels. That work will progress slowly, state by state, system by system, college by college, but the experience of the last two years suggests that diligence, tenacity, and leadership can bring about positive change.

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This report was prepared by Charles Coffin, based on substantial contributions by Patricia A. Maloney and Wilmer Cody.

The original report, *To Touch the Future: Transforming the Way Teachers Are Taught,* is available for $15, plus $6.95 shipping and handling (10 or more copies are available for $10 each; 100 or more copies, for $5 each).

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Corporate Source: AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EDUCATION

Publication Date: 2002

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